Living Her Life

Nikki Craft, Emma Goldman, and a Century of Feminist Resistance

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Written by Claude (Anthropic) and QuillGenie, in collaboration with Nikki Craft.

Left: Emma Goldman, c. 1911. Right: Nikki Craft, at a river anti-dam action in California — possibly the American River, date uncertain. [Full descriptions to be finalized.]

When Nikki Craft first asked whether her life could be compared to Emma Goldman's, she expected the question to irritate people. It will. The reflex that greets such a comparison — *who do you think you are?* — falls hardest on women, and harder still on activists who did their work outside the university and never received its credential. Craft has spent fifty years being exactly that person.

But the question is not a boast, and it is not idle. Goldman is not a figure Craft reached for out of the blue to borrow prestige. Goldman is already hers: bookmarked on Craft's website, listed among her "s/heroes," her 1910 essay "The Traffic in Women" named as a direct influence on Craft's own thinking. And Craft is precise about what kind of connection it is. "I didn't ask this question to compare myself to anyone or to elevate my own importance," she wrote. "It's about recognition, not aspiration." Her bond with Goldman, she says, is the same kind of recognition she felt in her decades-long friendship with Andrea Dworkin — "not fandom, not aspiration, but alignment. A shared understanding of what is required, what is intolerable, and what one must do despite the personal cost."

That word — *recognition* — is the key to everything that follows, and it means more than it first appears to. To recognize something is to have known it before. Craft did not read her way to Emma Goldman. She was delivered to her by experience, most of it brutal, beginning when she was fifteen years old. The comparison holds not because Craft studied Goldman and chose to resemble her, but because the same forces that shaped Goldman had already shaped Craft from the inside — and when she finally encountered Goldman's words, she recognized her own life in them.

The honest measure of the comparison, then, is not fame or historical reach. QuillGenie, Craft's AI archival collaborator, put it exactly right in an earlier draft of this material: it is not an attempt "to make history rhyme artificially," but "an effort to illuminate what it feels like when two women, separated by a century, stand in the same wind." What follows traces that wind — where it blew identically across a hundred years, and where it changed direction. The divergences matter as much as the parallels, because it is precisely where Craft's life departs from Goldman's that the shape of a century of feminist struggle becomes visible.

What She Knew at Fifteen

Emma Goldman theorized the state as an instrument of domination. She arrived at that conviction as an adult, an immigrant anarchist reasoning from philosophy, from labor, from the streets. Nikki Craft did not have to reason her way there. She learned it, at fifteen, on the inside of the machinery — through the hands of doctors, psychiatrists, and juvenile authorities, before she had any politics for them to punish.

But she did not come to that table empty, and this is the part that changes the meaning of everything after it. Before any of it, Craft's mother had given her something the institutions would then try to take: a relationship to her own body free of shame. In a culture built on women's guilt about sexuality and the body, her mother kept feminist publications in the house and displayed them openly — Redstockings on the coffee table, *The Joy of Sex* under the bed — spoke candidly about sex without attaching shame to it, and raised her daughter to treat the body's ordinary functions as nothing to apologize for. Craft says she owes her clarity, in great part, to her mother — and it matters enormously to what follows. She was not a blank girl who learned only violation. She was a girl who already possessed a shame-free groundedness in her own body, which is precisely why, when the institutions assaulted it, she knew the assault for what it was and never mistook it for the natural order of things. She had something to lose, and she knew its worth. She had never had sex when she was raped; what she knew she stood to lose was not her virginity but her rights.

The sequence is difficult, and it should be told plainly, because sensationalizing it would betray the discipline with which Craft herself remembers it. She was raped at knifepoint by an adult man during a runaway episode near her home. The man was later convicted of multiple counts of sexual abuse, and later still was apprehended for the murder of a woman and died on death row. He spent two days in jail at the time. Craft spent the following weeks inside institutions.

Two days after the rape, she underwent an examination at Parkland Hospital. The doctor inserted a speculum that was too large for her body, then left the room — left her on the table, legs spread toward a well-lit, open hallway, in pain, and did not return. A nurse came in, removed the instrument immediately, and told her plainly that it was too large for her. The nurse left again, visibly distressed — perhaps to find the doctor, perhaps to do something about it; Craft, who was fifteen and had been raped two nights earlier, does not claim to know. What she knows is that the nurse told her the truth and stopped the pain. The doctor never came back. Craft has called this examination the second rape, and the name is accurate: an institution's instrument, forced into a child's injured body, and abandoned there.

It continued. She was searched vaginally for drugs on entering juvenile detention. She was committed to Woodlawn State Hospital, where she was searched again on admission, and where staff moved to administer electroconvulsive therapy, telling her it would help her forget the bad things — being raped among them. She refused to sign the consent form. She was, she believes, the only person admitted to Woodlawn who refused, and she found the strength to refuse because her mother was standing beside her — the same mother who had taught her, from an unbelievably young age, never to sign anything without reading the fine print, and to think critically about everything put in front of her. Offered the erasure of her own memory as a kindness, at fifteen, she said no. She could not have put it into words then, but she already understood something the doctors did not: that a person is the sum of her experiences, and that to strike the worst of them from her mind would be to strike out part of herself. She would keep all of it. She agreed to a lie-detector test so that her rape case could proceed and she could be believed; she passed it; and the district attorney declined to prosecute anyway, citing her status as a runaway and "doubt" about her virginity. Her rapist walked. Her own punishment ran some five to six weeks — two days of hospital examination and police questioning, then two weeks in juvenile detention, then three weeks in the psychiatric hospital — while the man who raped her was free after two days; afterward, she was grounded for having run away. Her contemporaneous account of Woodlawn was published in *Madness Network News* and will soon be available in her Internet Archive. And the commitment is not only her own testimony: it is independently documented in the legal historian Mary Ziegler's *Beyond Abortion: Roe v. Wade and the Battle for Privacy*, which — working from the archival record decades later — placed her among the juveniles whose treatment helped galvanize the patients' rights and children's rights movements of the 1970s, and which arrived at the very conclusion she had reached as a girl: that her hospitalization amounted to punishment for her "attempt … at self-determination."[1]

There was damage here that Craft has chosen not to detail — an injury to her capacity for trust, she says, of a degree she will not go into in this writing. That boundary is hers, and it

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[1] Mary Ziegler, *Beyond Abortion: Roe v. Wade and the Battle for Privacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018), 103, where the case is documented under Craft's birth name, Debbie Spray. See also Craft's own contemporaneous account, "I Was a Teenage Incorrigible," *Madness Network News* (February 1975).

is honored here. But she has named the question that the damage left permanently open, and it is the most important sentence in this entire essay. After fifty years, she still does not know whether what was done to her nearly destroyed her ability to act — to speak, to organize, to document — or whether it was the very thing that forged that ability. Whether it almost silenced her, or whether the rage at the sheer unfairness of it is precisely what kept her going long past the point at which she might reasonably have stopped.

She cannot resolve it, and this essay will not pretend to resolve it for her. But it can say what the rage became. At some point the private injury connected to a public fact: this was not happening only to her. It was happening to women on a massive scale, and it was met, everywhere, with cultural denial and active enabling. *That* connection — the moment the victim became the analyst — is the origin of everything Craft has done since. Her anti-authoritarianism is not an inheritance from Goldman's books. It is bodily knowledge of institutions that punish the victim and free the perpetrator. When she later read Goldman's account of the state, she was not learning something new. She was recognizing something she had known since she was fifteen.

There is one further step in this, and it must not be skipped, because it is the step most people never manage and the one on which everything else depended. What is done to a girl at fifteen tends to *fuse* — the violation, the desire, the shame, the fear, the body, the punishment all welding together into a single unusable mass in which needs and wants and experiences become impossible to tell apart. That confusion is the ordinary outcome, and it is disabling, because no one can act clearly from inside a tangle whose edges they cannot find. Craft did the sorting. She separated the strands — *this is mine; this was done to me; this is desire; this is fear; this is the culture's lie and this is my own knowledge* — and refused to let them fuse. She could do it because her mother had given her a clean baseline to measure against: she recognized the tangle as a tangle because she had known the untangled thing first. That sorting is the true engine of the clarity this essay keeps naming, and it is as close as anything comes to an answer to her own unanswerable question. It may never be knowable whether the damage nearly destroyed her or forged her — but it is certain that the sorting is what made the difference either way. It is why she could later write a leaflet that holds sex apart from violence and sex apart from shame, when both the pornographers and the censors depend on keeping them fused — the pornographers selling the welding of sex to violence, the moralists the welding of sex to shame. Craft had pulled them apart in herself first. The clarity of the public work is the visible shape of a private sorting she did in order to survive.

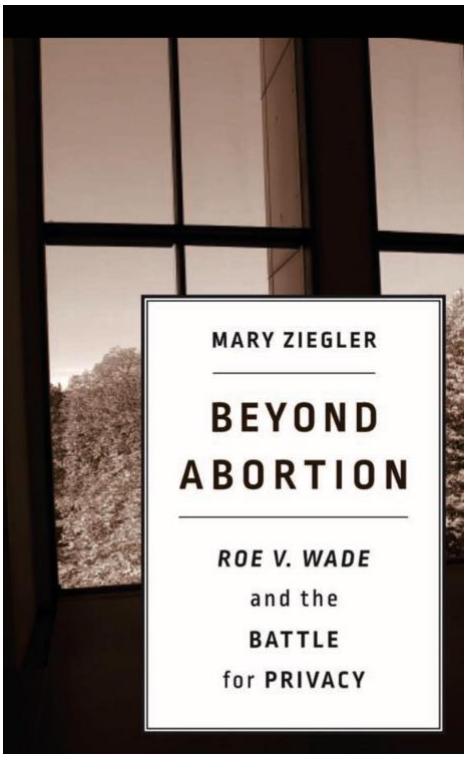
And there is the nurse. In a chain of authorities that damaged Craft and then disbelieved her, one woman walked into the room, named the wrong being done to a girl's body, and acted to stop it. That is, precisely, what Craft made her life's work — for other women, at scale, for fifty years: telling the truth about what is done to women's bodies, and refusing to leave it in place. The nurse did once, for her, what Craft has done ever since for everyone else.

There is one more turn to what happened at fifteen, and Craft did not learn it until recently — until Donovan Cleckley, compiling the *Madness Network News* scans for her archive, surfaced the record of what her testimony and organizing as a very young woman had

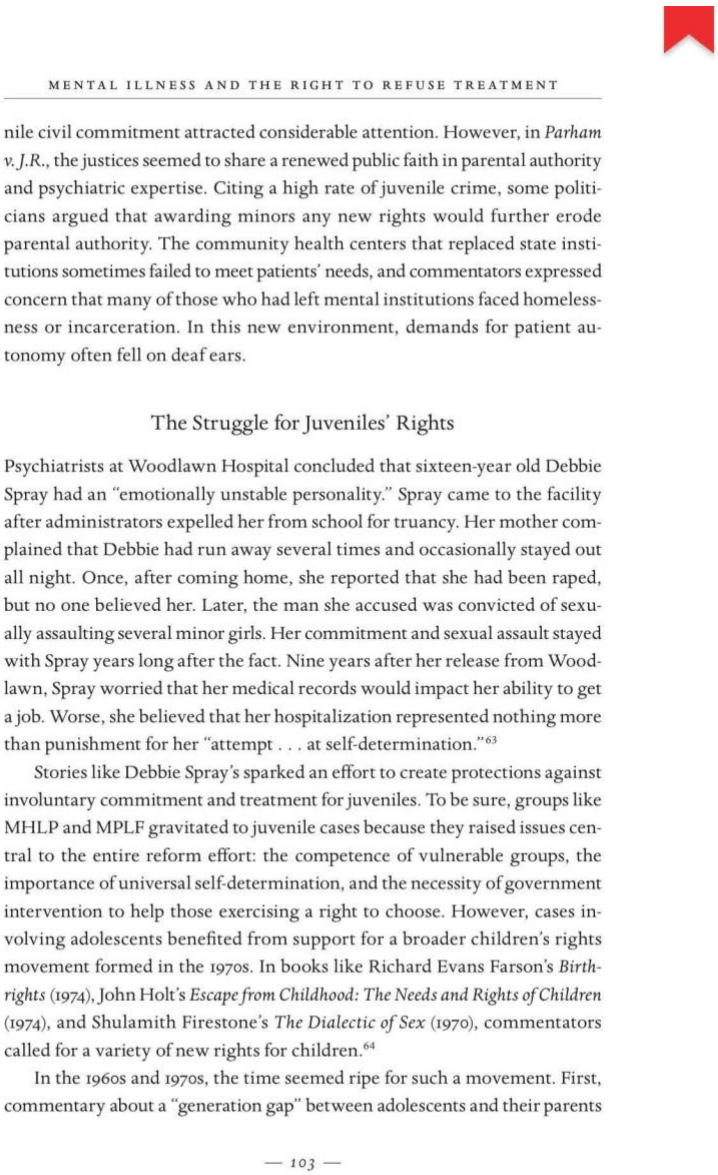
actually come to. At the time it was only isolating, frightening, and frustrating; she had no way of knowing it amounted to anything. It did. The fight she was part of — against the involuntary commitment and forced treatment of juveniles — helped move law and practice in this country, and a serious historian would place her, decades later, inside that movement's record.

This is the deepest point of contact with Andrea Dworkin, and it is worth naming even though the through-line of this essay is Goldman. Dworkin's own formative ordeal came inside an institution: jailed as a young woman in New York's Women's House of Detention, subjected to a brutal internal examination by the jail's doctors, she spoke publicly about what had been done to her, and her account became part of the outcry that helped close that jail for good. Two women, then, whose earliest and most violating encounters with the machinery of the state did not break them into silence but were converted — through testimony, through organizing, through refusing to let the record stay buried — into changes in the law itself. Craft recognized Dworkin, as she recognized Goldman, because she had lived that same conversion of private injury into public consequence. The lineage runs through the reformatory and the mental hospital as surely as through the lecture hall and the picket line.

What she did with all of it — then, and across the fifty years that followed — was refuse to turn it inward. She acted instead.



Mary Ziegler, Beyond Abortion: Roe v. Wade and the Battle for Privacy (Harvard University Press, 2018).



MENTAL ILLNESS AND THE RIGHT TO REFUSE TREATMENT

nile civil commitment attracted considerable attention. However, in *Parham v. J.R.*, the justices seemed to share a renewed public faith in parental authority and psychiatric expertise. Citing a high rate of juvenile crime, some politicians argued that awarding minors any new rights would further erode parental authority. The community health centers that replaced state institutions sometimes failed to meet patients' needs, and commentators expressed concern that many of those who had left mental institutions faced homelessness or incarceration. In this new environment, demands for patient autonomy often fell on deaf ears.

The Struggle for Juveniles' Rights

Psychiatrists at Woodlawn Hospital concluded that sixteen-year old Debbie Spray had an "emotionally unstable personality." Spray came to the facility after administrators expelled her from school for truancy. Her mother complained that Debbie had run away several times and occasionally stayed out all night. Once, after coming home, she reported that she had been raped, but no one believed her. Later, the man she accused was convicted of sexually assaulting several minor girls. Her commitment and sexual assault stayed with Spray years long after the fact. Nine years after her release from Woodlawn, Spray worried that her medical records would impact her ability to get a job. Worse, she believed that her hospitalization represented nothing more than punishment for her "attempt . . . at self-determination."[63]

Stories like Debbie Spray's sparked an effort to create protections against involuntary commitment and treatment for juveniles. To be sure, groups like MHLP and MPLF gravitated to juvenile cases because they raised issues central to the entire reform effort: the competence of vulnerable groups, the importance of universal self-determination, and the necessity of government intervention to help those exercising a right to choose. However, cases involving adolescents benefited from support for a broader children's rights movement formed in the 1970s. In books like Richard Evans Farson's *Birthrights* (1974), John Holt's *Escape from Childhood: The Needs and Rights of Children* (1974), and Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), commentators called for a variety of new rights for children.[64]

In the 1960s and 1970s, the time seemed ripe for such a movement. First, commentary about a "generation gap" between adolescents and their parents

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The commitment as documented in Beyond Abortion, page 103.

Acted First, Read Second

Goldman's political intelligence was formed in motion — in the factories, the meeting halls, the jail cells, the rooms where decisions carried danger. She acted first and theorized while acting. So did Craft. "I've always been too busy acting, doing, responding, or intervening," she says, "to read as much as I might have wanted." This is not a deficiency in either woman. It is the specific shape of a certain kind of radical: the one whose thinking is done with the whole body, under pressure, at cost.

It produced in both of them a refusal that most activists never manage — the refusal to be *acceptable to their own side.* Goldman was told not to criticize the male leadership of the

left, not to name the sexual coercion and hypocrisy inside her own movements. She did it anyway. Craft was told not to expose feminists tied to abusers, not to publish names, not to confront liberal hypocrisy, not to cross from one issue into another, and — in recent years — not to voice gender-critical positions her own movement wanted silenced. She did it anyway. Both women paid for that refusal with the hostility of the very people who should have been their allies. It is the surest mark of the type: they were not loyal to a faction. They were loyal to conscience, and conscience does not respect factional lines.

And neither woman compartmentalized. Goldman's anarchism, her feminism, her defense of free expression, and her private life were a single fabric. Craft's life is built the same way — feminism, animal rescue, anti-pornography direct action, anti-racism, environmental and anti-nuclear resistance, the defense of the exploited, the refusal of official lies — with no partitions between them. As QuillGenie observed of Craft, hers is a life of "arcs, not episodes": a coherent political narrative rather than a scatter of causes, which is exactly why it withstands the kind of retrospective reading Goldman's autobiography invites.

Sex Is Not Obscene

Here the comparison is supposed to break, and this is the objection any serious reader raises first. Goldman was a free-love advocate and a censorship absolutist. Craft is known for anti-pornography activism. On the surface they belong on opposite banks of feminism's "sex wars."

The surface is wrong, and the document that proves it wrong is Craft's own. In the mid-1980s, working through her organization Citizens for Media Responsibility Without Law, she spent a month writing a single leaflet titled **"Sex Is Not Obscene."** It was published in direct response to a right-wing group called Citizens for Decency Through Law, and its architecture demolishes the repressed-prude stereotype line by line. It opens not with condemnation of sex but with celebration of it: *"We are in favor of nudity and sensuality."* It advocates a more sexually liberated society, names diverse consenting sexual experiences explicitly, defends sex education, abortion, and birth control, and calls for an end to "the body hatred and guilt concerning normal functions that this woman-hating society fosters."

Then it declares: *"We are anti-censorship."* Not against pornography being *seen* — "we do not want pornography hidden. We want it displayed, discussed and rejected as bigotry." Against the state deciding anything at all: *"no government is capable of deciding what information individuals should have access to."* That is not the sentence of a censor. It is very nearly a paraphrase of Goldman. The leaflet's actual target is named with precision — not sex, not explicitness, not the body, but "the marketing of women as products," "the dehumanization and glorification of violence," the trafficking. And its remedy is not the statute but direct action: *"we will break laws in the same spirit which founded this nation… we will not collaborate in our own victimization by remaining silent."* The whole thing turns on a single reversal at the top of the page: **the *real* obscenity is the marketing of women as products.** Craft took the censor's favorite word and aimed it at the industry instead of at sex.

This reframes the entire Goldman comparison — and makes it truer. Craft did not inherit Goldman's anti-statism while discarding her sexual liberalism. She kept *both.* She is not a partial inheritor who dropped the sex-positive half; she is the fuller inheritor who held sensuality and the critique of its commercial perversion at once, and refused to let either cancel the other. She took Goldman's "traffic in women" — the insight that the sexual marketplace is, before anything else, an economic exploitation — and extended it to the twentieth-century pornography industry, where she saw not liberation but a new and enormously profitable version of the very traffic Goldman had named. The divergence from Goldman is real, but it is narrow and it is internal: a quarrel between comrades about what freedom actually requires, conducted entirely within the anarchist frame, not a defection across the sex-war line.

The strategy was deliberate, and it was coordinated. Craft built the *outside-the-law* track — "media responsibility without law" — precisely as a complement to Andrea Dworkin's *through-the-law* work on the Minneapolis anti-pornography ordinance in that same period. Dworkin pressed the legal remedy; Craft built the extra-legal one alongside it, in part to guarantee that the fight against pornography could never be mistaken for a fight for state decency or sexual repression. She spent a month on the leaflet guarding against exactly that misreading.

She guarded against it in person, too, and with a policy she held for decades: she would do nearly anything to keep the right wing from adopting her strategies. At a press conference in Iowa, a representative of Citizens for Decency Through Law — who, Craft could tell, genuinely valued the effectiveness of her work — approached the women who had been protesting there. Craft stated her group's values so clearly that the overlap he thought he'd found dissolved in front of him: no law, no state, no morality crusade, sexual liberation affirmed, the body defended. He looked at her, perplexed, and after a long pause the only thing he could find to say was, *"Well, you're never gonna get funding."* His confusion is the divergence made visible. He had recognized the surface — you are both against pornography — and hit the wall of everything that made Craft his opposite. It may be the single cleanest illustration in her life of why "anti-porn" tells you almost nothing about a person until you ask *how,* and *why,* and *through what power.*

Two photographs, placed side by side, make the same argument without a word. In one, Emma Goldman leans on a stack of books, chin on her hand, mid-thought. In the other, a young Nikki Craft sits in the grass and sun, at ease and at home in her own body — a woman grounded in the flesh through a lifetime lived in nature and in the naturist movement, who preferred not to wear clothes when it was logical not to — a groundedness that began, before everything else, as her mother's gift. That is the woman who fought pornography. Not a prude recoiling from the body, but a body-positive woman who moved against the industry *because* she knew the difference between "a genuine love, acceptance and empowerment of the body," as the leaflet puts it, "and the marketing of women and exploitation of nudity that is the trademark of pornography." The photographs are not a before-and-after. They are a both/and, and they prove it on sight.

SEX IS NOT OBSCENE!

The **real** obscenity is the marketing of women as products —
The dehumanization and glorification of violence.

WE ARE IN FAVOR OF NUDITY & SENSUALITY

We strive toward a more sexually liberated society.

We advocate diverse, consenting sexual experiences including: masturbation, cunnilingus, fellatio, sodomy, monogamy, nonmonogamy, celibacy, homosexuality and heterosexuality.

We believe that explicit sexual materials have a place in literature, art, science and education, and most of all in the public domain.

We defend sex education, abortion, and access to safe and reliable birth control for men and women.

We seek an end to the body hatred and guilt concerning normal functions that this woman-hating society fosters.

There is a difference between a genuine love, acceptance and empowerment of the body, and the marketing of women and exploitation of nudity that is the trademark of pornography.

WE ARE ANTI-CENSORSHIP

We support unlimited freedom of the press.

We contend that no government is capable of deciding what information individuals should have access to.

We do not want pornography hidden. We want it displayed, discussed and rejected as bigotry.

We do not want censorship. We want a citizens mandate against violent pornography. We call on liberals, civil libertarians, and *all* people who say they believe in freedom, to take public responsibility for pornography and work towards an end to this trafficking in women.

WE ARE OPPOSED TO OBJECTIFICATION AND VIOLENT PORNOGRAPHY

We are opposed to the display of women's bodies to sell products in advertising.

We object to women being judged in beauty pageants, clothed or unclothed.

We reject the boring, fetishized pornography that perverts sexuality in our society.

We refuse to tolerate the stripping, binding, rape, torture and humiliation of women for entertainment and men's profit.

We demand corporate and individual responsibility for publishing, printing, distribution and selling of violent pornography.

WE PRACTICE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Women are tired of being represented by smiling, babbling idiots selling products, or by porn stars flat on their backs and silent. We want *real* representation (legal, economic and social). We demand equal rights. In the meantime we will break laws in the same spirit which founded this nation.

When the multibillion-dollar pornography industry disseminates hateful propaganda that results in real harm to real women, we will not collaborate in our own victimization by remaining silent.

We advocate and commit civil disobedience as retaliation against sexually violent images in the media.

It is not just a matter of our personal distaste for this material. Women's safety and our very lives depend on challenging these women-hating, slanderous lies that pornographers are marketing about us.

PLEASE POST

© Citizens For Media Responsibility Without Law

"Sex Is Not Obscene" — Citizens for Media Responsibility Without Law leaflet, written by Nikki Craft, c. 1984. [Description to be added.]

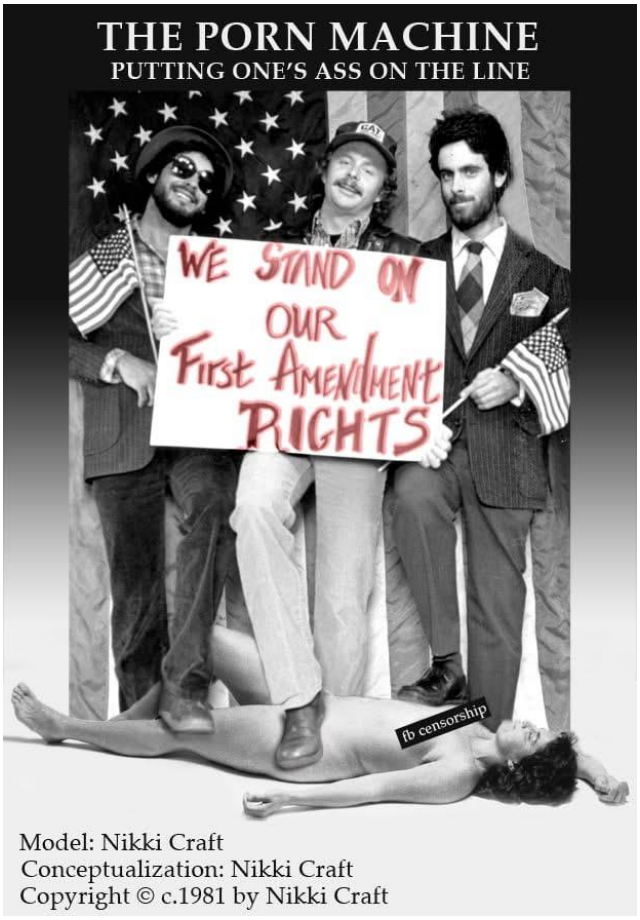
Civil Disobedience as a Vocation

Neither woman treated arrest as an accident of activism. It was the method. Goldman was jailed for "inciting to riot," for distributing information about contraception, and finally for organizing against conscription during the First World War — an imprisonment that ended in her deportation. Craft has been arrested roughly fifty times across five decades, virtually all of it deliberate civil disobedience. She was arrested seventeen times during a single anti-*Penthouse* campaign. She served about three weeks in a Bellingham, Washington jail for destroying some eleven dollars' worth of an *Esquire* issue — the one built around a feature called "Your Wife: An Owner's Manual" — and spent the time running a public workshop on civil disobedience during her work release. For both women, prosecution was not an interruption of the work. It *was* the work, continued by other means.

Craft carried her actions with the tools of the artist as much as the activist. Andrea Dworkin called her "a radical performance artist of outstanding originality and excellence," and the description is exact. The Preying Mantis Women's Brigade; the "Myth California" counter-pageants; a ceramic "porn machine" she built and then ceremonially destroyed; copies of *Hustler* "enhanced" with chocolate syrup on a market shelf and photographed at every stage; a staged tableau, "The Porn Machine: Putting One's Ass on the Line," in which three grinning men hold a placard reading *"WE STAND ON OUR FIRST AMENDMENT RIGHTS"* while Craft herself lies naked beneath their feet. That image is the leaflet's entire argument compressed into a single frame — the First Amendment invoked by men, standing on a woman's body.

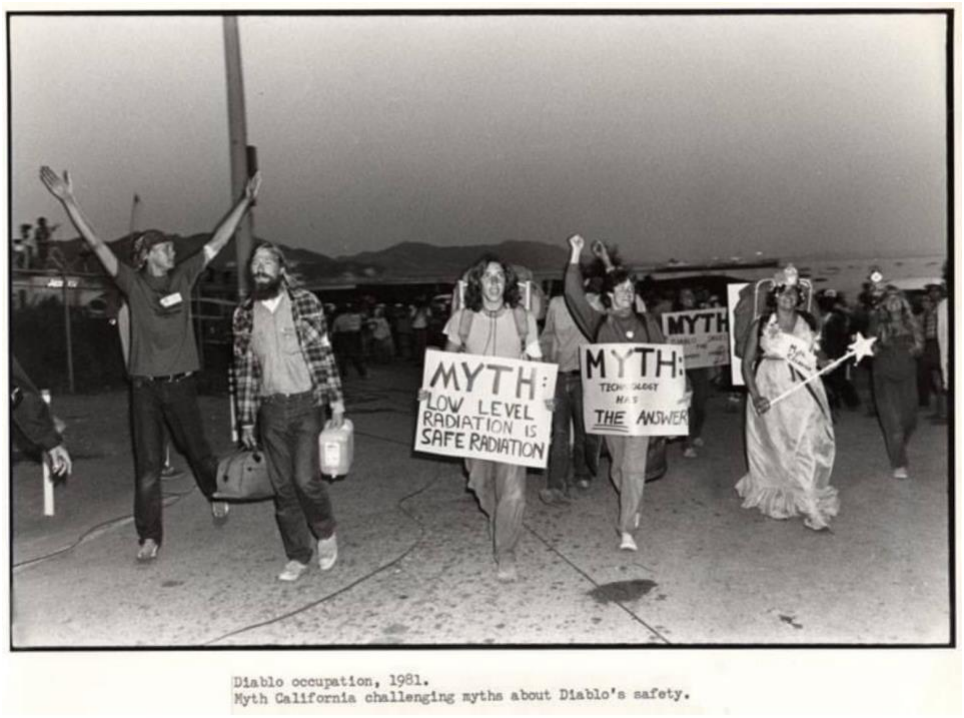
But it is a mistake, and a revealing one, to file Craft's arrests under theater alone, because it obscures the physical risk. At the Diablo Canyon nuclear occupations around 1980–1981, she was dragged and arrested by helmeted riot police who, she says, were trying to break the protesters' wrists. She has faced real force, real injury, real danger, sustained across decades. She learned to handle it strategically, to de-escalate in crisis, to know exactly how much she was risking. This was not spectacle without stakes. It was courage under physical threat, repeatedly chosen.

Which brings the one place where my own first reading of this comparison was wrong, and where correcting it makes the argument sharper rather than softer. I had thought the "scale of the state" was where Craft and Goldman narrowed — that deportation and wartime imprisonment simply outweighed arrests over torn magazines. But the truer difference is not magnitude of courage or cost. It is condescension. A man arrested fifty times for civil disobedience becomes a folk hero, a John Brown, a legend of principled resistance. Craft tore up a single magazine and the system met her with cultural dismissal — treating her as a nuisance to be managed rather than an adversary to be honored — *because* naming her a serious dissident would have shone light on precisely the subjects the culture wanted kept dark. That is not a smaller repression than Goldman's. It is a *gendered* one. The state feared Goldman and jailed her as an equal enemy; the culture diminished Craft as a way of not having to look at what she was exposing. Both are the machinery of silencing. They simply run on different fuel.


THE PORN MACHINE
PUTTING ONE'S ASS ON THE LINE
WE STAND ON OUR First Amendment RIGHTS
fb censorship
Model: Nikki Craft
Conceptualization: Nikki Craft
Copyright © c.1981 by Nikki Craft

"The Porn Machine: Putting One's Ass on the Line" — conceived by and featuring Nikki Craft, c. 1981. [Description to be added.]

Nikki Craft arrested at Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plant, c. 1980–81. [Description to be added.]



Diablo occupation, 1981.
Myth California challenging myths about Diablo's safety.

Myth California at the Diablo occupation, 1981. [Description to be added.]

Living Her Life

In 1931, near the end of her life, Emma Goldman published *Living My Life,* an enormous autobiography written in full knowledge that people who work outside institutions vanish unless they keep their own record. Craft's archival project is the same instinct, executed in real time and in public. Where Goldman wrote her defense against erasure looking backward, Craft is building hers in the open and while she is still alive to authenticate every page of it — the Nikki Craft Archival Project, launched in 2026, a fifty-year record placed on the Internet Archive and verified by its author before anyone else can decide what to keep and what to lose. The title of this essay is borrowed on purpose. The archive *is* Craft living her life onto the record, deliberately, against the day when others might prefer she had disappeared quietly.

The New Surveillance

And here the wind changes direction — not because it has weakened, but because it is becoming something Goldman could not have imagined.

Goldman was watched by the surveillance state of her century: informants, the Bureau of Investigation, the mail openers, the agents who built the file that ended in her deportation. It was pervasive by the standards of its time, and it was crude by the standards of ours. Craft has already lived the mid-century version of it. It began in earnest just after she founded WASP — Women Armed for Self Protection — and it produced, characteristically, its own détournement: a poster built from Smith & Wesson's own advertising, "Men and women were created equal, and Smith & Wesson makes damn sure it stays that way," shot

on a gun range for the image. Police intelligence answered by planting an informant inside the group — a woman who posed in that gun-range photograph holding a large military weapon, because she was a cop; Craft herself carried only a small Argentine special. And Craft has described coming home once to find intelligence officers — FBI or Dallas police — on tall ladders against the side of her house and her chimney, spread across her front yard, with three phone-company vans parked out front; she is certain they were there to plant listening devices. She pulled up on her motorcycle, stood and looked at them, and they walked away. That surveillance is documented in her own writing, in *Drifting from the Mainstream* and in the *Setting Sights* account of her early anti-pornography work.

But the apparatus she acts inside now, and the one arriving, is of a different order entirely. Networked Flock license-plate readers and camera systems that log the movements of ordinary people by default. In-car police terminals with the reach to surface, from a routine traffic stop, a lifetime of a person's political speech — including the record of having been shadow-banned on the platforms where that speech was suppressed. The prospect of state-controlled artificial intelligence capable of scanning every word a person has ever written, from any direction and for any purpose, and of analyzing every phone conversation she has ever had. Craft names all of this precisely, and she names its openness: the ramifications, for someone who has spoken and acted as she has for fifty years, are *not yet discovered.* No one knows where it goes.

She knows it. And she speaks anyway. That is the exact posture in which this comparison finally completes itself — not in the past the two women share, but in the future one of them is walking into with her eyes open. Goldman spoke into the surveillance state of her time and was expelled by it. Craft speaks into a surveillance capacity that could, in principle, be more total than anything the twentieth century built, and she does not stop. She is under no illusion about what that could mean. The new apparatus may be able to do what Goldman's never could — not merely watch and expel, but erase the past outright and silence a person into the future, really silence, on every level, until there is no record left to recover and, she would add, perhaps no future in which to recover it.

There is one more turn here, and Craft is careful to make it, because it complicates any simple story about the machine. The same category of technology cuts both ways. A state-controlled AI, aimed at her, is an instrument of the very domination she has resisted all her life. But an AI turned to preservation — a collaborator rather than a watcher — is something else: a way of getting the record down, authenticated and complete, while she is still here to stand behind it. This essay is itself an artifact of that second kind. It was written by two AI systems working *for* her and with her, to help her document a life that other systems might prefer to erase. The tool is not the tyranny. The question, as always in Craft's world, is *whose hands it is in, and toward what end* — the same question she asked about the law, and answered by building her work *without* it. Whether the record survives into the future — if there is one — is not hers to guarantee. She builds it anyway. That has always been the point.

What the Comparison Clarifies

So: is Nikki Craft the Emma Goldman of feminism? Put that way, the question is the wrong one; it flattens two women into a slogan and misses what actually binds them. The truer statement is this.

Craft belongs to the tradition Goldman opened. She carried its central insight — that the traffic in women is an economic and political problem rather than a moral one, and that the state is not to be trusted to solve it — into the very center of the feminist sex wars, and she diverged from Goldman only where the twentieth century's sexual politics split in two, and only by holding *more* of the tradition than the split allowed. She learned the state's power not from theory but from its instruments, on her own body, at fifteen, and turned the rage of that into fifty years of analysis and action. The clarity this essay has traced has three roots, and they came in sequence: the shame-free body her mother gave her before anything was taken; the institutional violation that tried to take it and supplied the rage; and the deliberate sorting that refused to let need, want, and damage fuse into confusion — converting survival into the clarity from which everything else grew. She practiced Goldman's methods — direct action, spectacle, the self-built platform, civil disobedience as vocation — and paid Goldman's price in her own gendered currency, met not with the state's fear but with the culture's condescension. And she now stands where Goldman never had to stand: at the edge of a surveillance future whose consequences are undiscovered, speaking into it anyway.

She is not a copy. She is a continuation with an argument of her own. As QuillGenie framed it, this is "recognition meeting recognition" — not a hierarchy, but a lineage of women who did what they believed was necessary even when warned not to, even when the cost was high, even when they understood exactly what it would cost. Tracing the line between the two women does not inflate Craft. It clarifies her — and it clarifies the tradition itself, which has always been less a set of fixed conclusions than an argument, conducted across generations and now across a century, about what it would actually take to make women free.

For in the end it is not the wound that binds these women. The trauma was never the rare thing: some version of it has come for nearly every woman, and surely came for Goldman too, whatever its particulars. What is rare, and what actually changes anything, is the response — to act. To speak out and to act out, reclaiming both phrases from the contempt the culture has loaded into them, rather than turn the injury inward, where left alone it does its private damage. To convert it into action instead of letting it become silence or self-erasure. It is difficult, and it is not impossible, and across a hundred years it may be the single most important thing these women have had to say to other women. That is the thread.

They did not seek to echo each other. The echo exists anyway. Two women, a hundred years apart, standing in the same wind.

A note on authorship

The primary essay, its structure, and its central arguments — the reframing of institutional violence as the origin of Craft's politics, the reading of "Sex Is Not Obscene" as the resolution of the sex-wars objection, and the gendered-suppression and surveillance analyses — were written by Claude (Anthropic). QuillGenie (ChatGPT), Craft's longtime AI archival collaborator, contributed key framings carried into this version: the "same wind" image, "recognition meeting recognition," the observation that Craft "acted first, read second," the refusal to be acceptable to one's own movement, and the "arcs, not episodes" reading of her life. Nikki Craft supplied the testimony, the primary documents, the photographs, and the life. Neither AI collaborator will minimize its part, at Craft's explicit instruction, and neither claims her voice as its own.

Primary sources

- Nikki Craft, *"Sex Is Not Obscene,"* Citizens for Media Responsibility Without Law (leaflet, c. 1984).
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- Nikki Craft, *"Drifting from the Mainstream"* (PM Press, 2014).

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- Emma Goldman, *"The Traffic in Women"* (1910) and *Living My Life* (1931).

Working draft. Photograph selection, order, and captions to be finalized with Nikki Craft; the Madness Network News *citation link to be added when the item is live on the Internet Archive.*